

March 13, 2009

MONTANA FUEL REDUCTION PROJECTS

PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING DOCUMENT:

Fires in public forests and on public rangelands now threaten people, communities, and natural resources in ways never before seen in our nation's history. Today's forests contain previously unrecorded levels of fuel, while highly flammable invasive species now pervade many rangelands. They do so because decades of fire exclusion policies and other land management actions have altered fire's historic role in shaping plant communities.

To decrease risks from catastrophic wildfires, the Montana BLM has plans to complete 13,430 acres of fuels reduction projects in fiscal year 2009. These projects enhance public safety in the wildland-urban interface, and improve forest and rangeland health.

ISSUES:

The challenge to completing our prescribed fire projects is largely weather related. Both short-term and long-term drought continues to influence our ability to meet our prescribed fire goals. Record snowpack delayed the spring burn window, reducing the days available to burn. In some areas, the grass greened up under the snowpack, which delayed the burns until this fall. Where possible, we look for alternative methods for meeting our objectives, but in most cases, the best way to maintain fire-adapted ecosystems is to apply fire to the landscape.

MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:

The fuels reduction projects are planned on a landscape level, taking into account other resource management objectives and requirements.

Projects are developed through collaboration with our cooperators and accomplished through partnerships with local, tribal, state, and other federal agencies, as well as interested stakeholders. We use a combination of contracted and government labor, and mechanical and prescribed burning methods.

BUREAU PERSPECTIVE:

The utilization of stewardship contracting and Healthy Forest Initiatives tools, such as streamlined environmental analysis and categorical exclusions, will help in expediting critical fuels treatments in the wildland-urban interface.

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